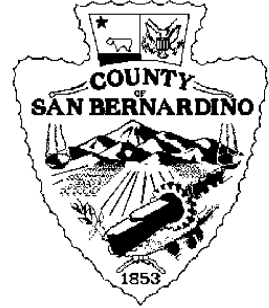


NEWS

From Supervisor Bill Postmus First District, San Bernardino County



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 8, 2003

For information, contact
Brad Mitzelfelt (909) 387-4830

SUPERVISORS TAKE ACTION TO ABATE SEVERE FIRE HAZARD CREATED BY BEETLE-INFESTED TREES

SAN BERNARDINO – The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors today stepped up its efforts to help mountain communities victimized by a bark beetle infestation and resulting severe fire danger by approving an action plan that includes the expenditure of more than \$3 million in federal and local funds.

Four years of record drought combined with overgrowth of trees and bark beetle infestation have destroyed much of the county's forest areas. The dead trees are potent fuel for devastating wild fires, which prompted the Board of Supervisors and later the State of California to declare a state of emergency in San Bernardino County's forest areas.

The Board today agreed to seek \$2,673,101 in federal grant funding through the State Office of Emergency Services (OES). These dollars were allocated by OES from a congressional appropriation of \$3.3 million for the Counties of Riverside and San Bernardino from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. The plan is to combine that funding with county contingency funds approved by the Board of Supervisors to remove and dispose of dead trees and protect the mountains from increased fire danger.

The county's bark beetle action plan approved by the Board includes efforts to do the following:

- Mapping mountain areas to determine priority of tree removal;
- Removing dead trees and associated debris, with an emphasis along fire evacuation routes and organizing removal crews by blocks;

-more-

BARK BEETLE PLAN 2-2-2-2

- Purchasing equipment, including a wood chipper, two incinerator devices, and a track-mounted log loader;
- Assisting low-income homeowners in reducing the cost of tree removal;
- Developing a public education campaign, and studying the possibility of developing a special local public financing district to provide additional funds to deal with tree removal on non-federal and non-state lands.

Postmus said the plan is an example of the County taking a leadership role along with the state and federal governments in dealing with the bark beetle emergency. "With the \$3.3 million secured by Congressman Jerry Lewis, combined with the half-million dollars set aside by the Board of Supervisors, we're finally bringing some substantial tools to bear on this problem," Postmus said.

The U.S. Forest Service has mapped about 100,000 acres of tree death in the county, more than a quarter of it on private land. In the Lake Arrowhead area, as much as 80 percent of the trees on many lots are dead. Hardest hit so far are the communities of Lake Arrowhead, Big Bear, Running Springs, Crestline, and Lake Gregory. Wrightwood, Mill Creek, Forest Falls, Mt. Baldy and Lytle Creek are also affected.

Postmus stressed that the plan efforts need to be implemented in all mountain and forest areas where the problem exists, including the Angeles National Forest area and Wrightwood. "The problem will only get worse there, especially if these areas are neglected in the implementation of this plan," Postmus said.

He also stated his preference that most if not all of the 21 proposed county-employee positions identified in the plan be temporary contract employees rather than permanent employees. The positions include code enforcement officers, fire prevention officers, grounds caretakers, equipment operators and a program coordinator. "In our current budgetary situation, even with this emergency in place, I don't think it's responsible to grow the size of county government in a way that's not clearly funded into the future," Postmus said.

Postmus also asked county staff to return to the Board with a Public Education plan that clearly states how the County will inform residents on the progress of efforts to deal with the bark beetle emergency. "We're approving a considerable plan of action here today, but I should point out that mountain residents can do more to help themselves in dealing with this problem on their own property than government can do for them," Postmus said. "The public needs to know the scope of the problem and how it will likely affect them. They also need to know what they can do, and where to call for information."